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## **Lingua (Journal) : Jespersen revisited: Negation in Romance and beyond**

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## Introduction to the special issue: “Jespersen revisited: Negation in Romance and beyond“

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This special issue of LINGUA assembles five selected papers presented at the conference “Negation and Clitics in Romance” (University of Zurich, February 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> 2012) which focus on diachronic variation in the expression of (sentential) negation, widely known as the *Jespersen cycle*. The volume contains one paper on Italo-Romance, two on French, and two on Dutch, which ensures a certain comparative aspect.

The morphological exponents of sentential negation are one of the most prominent examples of “cycles” in the diachrony of human languages (see e.g. van Gelderen 2009, 2011). Linguistic cycles are defined, in general, as linguistic changes “where a phrase or a word gradually disappears and is replaced by a new linguistic item” (cf. van Gelderen 2009:2). The so called *Jespersen cycle*, named after the Danish linguist Otto Jespersen<sup>1</sup> (cf. Jespersen 1917, 1924), describes the evolution of sentential negation as it has taken place or is currently taking place in many Indo-European languages such as English, French (cf. Larrivée/Ingham eds. 2011), and German (cf. Jäger 2008) as well as other Romance, Germanic, and Slavic varieties (negative cycles have been described e.g. for Russian, cf. Tsurska 2009, and Afrikaans, cf. Biberauer 2009).

The Jespersen cycle involves the phonetic weakening of a preverbal negative marker, which tends to be doubled by a second postverbal element (such as Latin/French PASSUM > *pas* ‘step’, MICAM > *mie* ‘crumb’, GUTTAM > *goutte* ‘drop’ or PUNCTUM > *point* ‘point’). These items, called *minimizers*, express small quantities and are seen initially as reinforcements of the first negative marker. Later on, they acquire an independent negative meaning and express sentential negation, first in co-occurrence with the former negative, and then alone, as the former negative is first cliticized and then lost in most cases.

In light of some recent descriptions of the negative cycle (cf. van der Auwera 2010:79, Jäger 2008:15), Jespersen’s (1924) original examples from French, English and German (cf. Jespersen 1992[1924]:479-480) in (1) can be described as part of a five-stage cycle, as shown in (2) and (3).

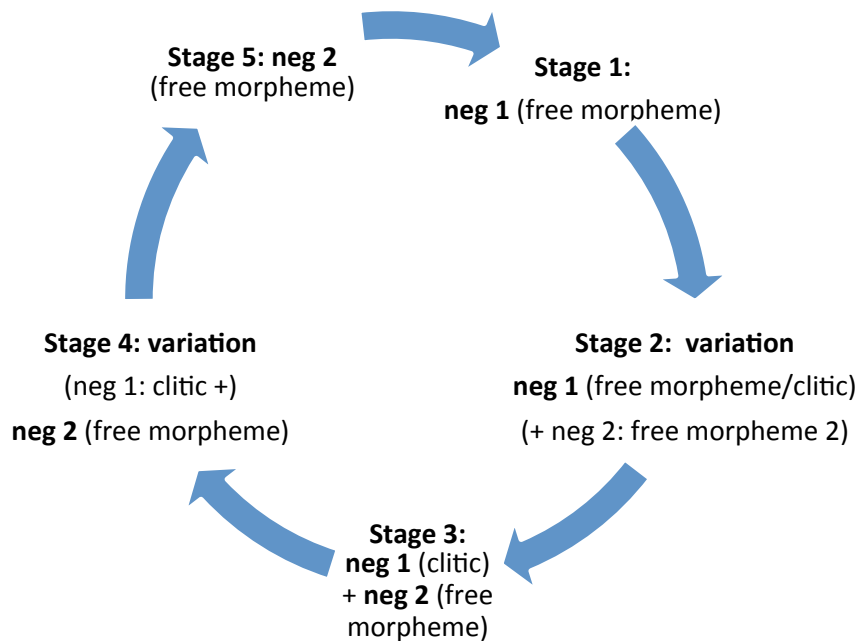
(1) Jespersen’s (1992[1924]:479-480) examples from French, English and German

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<sup>1</sup> Otto Jespersen was neither the first nor the only early researcher investigating this kind of grammaticalisation phenomena. Also the Egyptologist Alan Gardiner (cf. Gardiner 1904), Antoine Meillet (cf. Meillet 1912) and the Flemish dialectologist Edgard Blancquaert (cf. Blancquaert 1923) investigated this kind of language change.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Latin/French	<i>jeo ne di</i>	variation	<i>je ne dis pas</i>	variation	<i>je dis pas</i>
German	<i>nisagu</i>		<i>ih ensage niht</i>		<i>ich sage nicht</i>
English	<i>ic ne secge</i>		<i>i ne seye not</i>		<i>i say not</i>
	I NEG say		I NEG say NEG		I say NEG
	'I do not say'		'I do not say'		'I do not say'

(2) The Jespersen cycle in five stages



(3) The evolution of French negation particles according to a five-stage Jespersen cycle<sup>2</sup>

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
Our 5 stages	<i>non</i> <i>ne</i>	<i>ne</i> <i>ne...pas</i>	<i>ne</i> <i>ne...pas</i> <i>pas</i>	<i>ne...pas</i> <i>pas</i>	<i>pas</i>
Jespersen's 3 stages	<i>jeo ne di</i>		<i>je ne dis pas</i>		<i>je dis pas</i>

Following van der Auwera (2009) and many other recent descriptions of the Jespersen cycle, we choose to illustrate not only the three allegedly static stages of the cycle (1, 3, and 5), but also those stages of linguistic variation (2 and 4) that allow the change to take place (cf. van der Auwera 2010:79 and Völker 2003:103-127 for a discussion).

<sup>2</sup> For Latin, Jespersen (1992 [1924]) notes the forms *ne dico* and *non dico* as preliminary stages, adding that the former was limited to some verb forms such as *nescio* 'I do not know', *nequeo* 'I cannot' and *nolo* 'I do not want'. In all other cases we find, according to Jespersen (1992 [1924]:479), *ne* reinforced by *oenum*, 'thing' ; *ne-oenum* giving rise to the latin form *NON*, which can be seen as a preliminary negative cycle.

Some recent works challenge the cyclic view of negation adopted here. Breitbarth 2009, for example, argues that the Jespersen cycle in West Germanic can be described in terms of two simultaneous reanalyses: while the former negative marker is reanalysed as a polarity element, an independent reinforcer becomes the new negative marker. Chatzoupoulou (2013:36) attempts to redefine the Jespersen cycle in semantic terms as the fluctuation between intensified and non-intensified negation, in order to capture languages with a different morpho-syntactic makeup of negation (such as the Modern Greek negator *dhen* 'not', which is based on the intensified but not discontinuous negative indefinite *udhén* 'nothing'). Larrivée (2011) prefers the broad notion of "pathways of change" (Larrivée 2011:1) rather than a *cycle* for the changing morphology of negation in many languages, since most empirically documented changes do not fit the picture of "an orderly movement from preverbal to postverbal negative marking and back" (Larrivée 2011:2). Negative polarity and negative uses of certain items can co-exist for a long time and change is not necessarily unidirectional. From this perspective, even the evolution of French sentential negation stays "largely speculative" Larrivée (2011:11), as the presumed evolution of *pas*, *point*, and *mie* from positive elements to 'measure phrases' (as in *je ne marche pas* 'I do not walk a step') and subsequently to negative polarity items is hard to empirically prove by careful analyses of the available historical data (see also Grive-Smith 2010 for more empirical evidence).<sup>3</sup>

Despite the undeniable weaknesses of the Jespersen cycle as a cross linguistic concept which may induce too strong generalizations, it can be seen as a powerful metaphor that provides a very helpful framework for the structured description of a number of interrelated linguistic phenomena, at least for Romance and Germanic languages (i.e. those discussed in this special issue). There is a constantly growing body of literature devoted to the Jespersen cycle and its link to linguistic variation (cf. Déprez/Martineau 2004, Martineau/Mougeon 2003, Martineau/Vinet 2005.), to negative concord (cf. Breitbarth 2013, Hoeksema 2009), and to other linguistic 'cycles' (see the recently edited volume by Larrivée/Ingham 2011 and the network *Cycles of Grammaticalization* mentioned therein). We consider it useful and necessary to maintain the notion of a negative cycle as a guideline for the formulation of three broad research questions concerning its various stages and their comparison in languages that are not usually explicitly brought up in studies. This is where the five contributions of our special issue come in. They aim to locate the languages and varieties they discuss at different stages of the cycle or, if possible, to provide adequate syntactic accounts for different stages of Jespersen's cycle in various languages:

- (4) Broad questions regarding the Jespersen cycle
  - a. From stage 1 to stage 2: *How and why is a negation particle reinforced?*
  - b. From stage 2 to stage 3 to stage 4: *How does the cycle evolve? How can its stages be described syntactically?*

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<sup>3</sup> Möhren 1980 gives many other small quantity expressions in Old French that do not go on to develop an autonomous negative meaning.

c. From stage 4 to stage 5 or 1: *How does the cycle 'end', 'stagnate' or 'restart'?*

Of course, these questions may result in more detailed explorations, such as the one that concerns a possible interaction of the negative elements with other functional elements, which could trigger variation in stage 2 or stage 4.<sup>4</sup> For example, Meisner/Pomino 2014 show that in French, the clitic preverbal negative particle *ne* is sensitive to the phonological properties of the preceding element (the subject), and is dropped post-syntactically whenever this element is zero or extremely reduced (monosegmental). This is an innovative analysis of the observed variation in contemporary French (see question 4b).

**From stage 1 to stage 2: *How and why is a negation particle reinforced?***

A substantial body of work has focused on the evolution of indefinites into *n*-words in Larrivée/Ingham 2011, which shows that the mere availability of *n*-words as strong negative items co-occurring with the original negative marker seems to be of particular interest. However, this availability is not a sufficient condition for the cycle to start, as Larrivée (2011:5) remarks in his general critique on the Jespersen cycle as an 'unescapable' and exceptionless quasi automatic grammaticalization phenomenon, with regard to French (which shows negative concord with postverbal negative items) and English (which does not).

Additionally, Jespersen (e.g. 1992 [1924], 479) mentions not only a presumed overall expressive 'need' to reinforce negation, but especially the morpho-phonological weakness of the preverbal negative marker as a trigger for the activation of the cycle. The precise role of preverbal negative *clitics* (cf. e.g. Cattaneo 2009, Pescarini 2009 for Romance varieties) in the activation of the Jespersen cycle is a much discussed issue (see Postma 2002 on Middle Dutch, and Poletto/Garzonio in this volume for Italo-Romance). Thus Ingham 2011, reassessing the question of *ne* drop in Anglo-Norman and Middle English, insists that phonological weakening of the preverbal negative marker may also be the result, rather than the cause, of the rise of postverbal strong negative markers (like *not*). From this perspective, the loss of the original negative marker would be triggered by semantic-pragmatic reasons (it would have become a mere expletive) and not by its phonological properties. Contrary to this position, Poletto/Garzonio (this volume) state that the morpho-phonological nature of the preverbal negative marker is actually crucial for the activation of the cycle and elaborate on the idea that its morphological complexity can even block the activation of the cycle.

Comparing the evolution of French and Italian negation, **Cecilia Poletto** and **Jacopo Garzonio** (*The dynamics of the PF interface: negation and clitic clusters*) ask: why does the Jespersen cycle start in French, while it does not in Italian? The French preverbal negative particle *ne* is weakened, combined with a non-clitic

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<sup>4</sup> See Stark & Meisner & Völker (2014), i.e. the special issue 24-1 of the Journal of French Languages Studies in 2014 "Negation and Clitics in French: Interaction and Variation".

element and prone to be lost in modern French, while the Italian negative particle *non* does not show any signs of weakening. The authors argue, based on evidence from several old and modern Italo-Romance varieties (such as Emilian, Lombard, Piedmontese, Sicilian and Florentine), that it is the morphologically complex nature of the preverbal negative marker which blocks the activation of the grammaticalisation cycle (a negative marker is considered to be complex if it shows syntactically or phonologically determined alternation between [n] / [no] and [non]). It is suggested that morphological complexity can be attested by certain morpho-phonological processes such as the alternation between two forms of the negative marker (for example, the alternation between *no* and *non* in Old Florentine). This contribution sheds light on the activation of the Jespersen cycle and provides insights into the syntax-phonology interface (for instance, that some phonological processes, like deletion in Modern Eastern Sicilian, only apply to structurally adjacent heads).

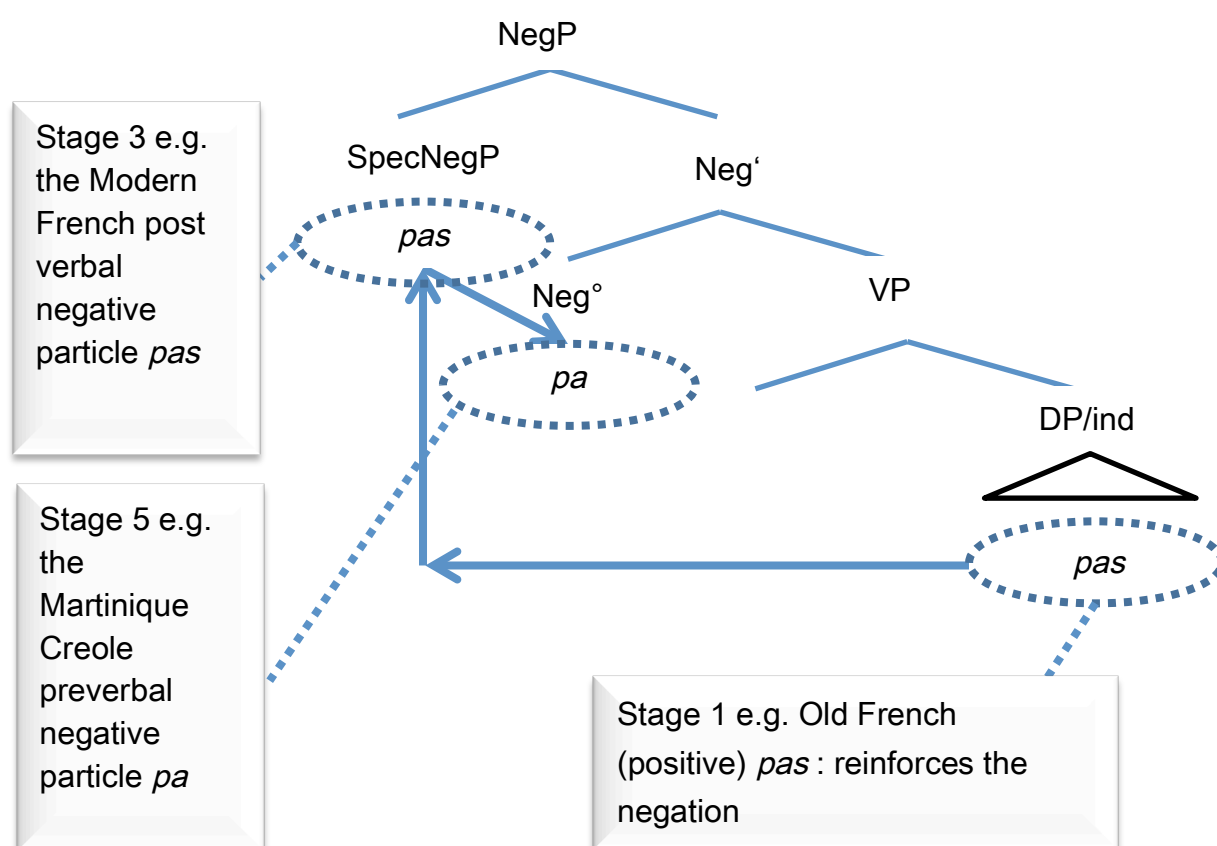
### **From stage 2 to stage 3 to stage 4: *How does the cycle evolve? How can its stages be described syntactically?***

Detailed syntactic descriptions of negative sentences in different languages can provide insights into the modelling of different stages of the negative cycle. See the observation formulated in Zeijlstra (2004, 2008): One of the prerequisites for initiation of the Jespersen cycle seems to be a structure of negative concord, with the original negative marker being a head (cf. Zeijlstra 2008). Thus, preverbal negative markers (stage 1) such as Italian *non*, Spanish *no* or Portuguese *não* are traditionally described as syntactic heads (cf. e.g. Zanuttini 1997:15-58) of a functional negative projection, while postverbal negative markers such as German *nicht* or English *not* are often conceived of as the specifiers of this projection. This concept of NegP, a negative functional projection (based on Pollock 1989, see also Haegeman 1996), easily accounts for languages with negative concord and pre- and postverbal negative marking (such as modern French *ne...pas* in stage 3). The negative head position is filled by the preverbal particle *ne*, while postverbal *pas* occupies the specifier position of the negative projection (SpecNegP). As an alternative to the NegP analysis of a bi-partite sentential negation, Biberauer/Roberts (2011) and Zeijlstra (2004) apply the AGREE operation of the minimalist framework (cf. Chomsky 2000, 2001) to languages with negative concord. This means that multiple co-occurrences of negative markers in one sentence, giving rise to a simple negative interpretation, are analysed as a negative feature checking mechanism between a probe and a goal in an asymmetric c-command configuration, similar to subject-verb agreement. The probe, sitting in the T-domain (the exact position is not specified by Roberts 2007:68), contains e.g. a preverbal negative particle like French *ne* carrying the uninterpretable negative feature [u-neg]. The goal, sitting lower in the structure, e.g. in the complement position of V°, contains for example the negative indefinite *personne* 'nobody' carrying the interpretable negative feature [i-neg]. This type of agreement analysis of bipartite negation is taken up by Haegeman/Breitbarth in this volume. By combining it with accounts of low polarity emphasis (see Batllori/Hernanz 2013 and Kandybowicz 2013), they analyse the particle Flemish *en*, which

carries a [u-neg] feature, similar to French *ne*, as the realization of a low, vP-related focus head.

Based on the NegP analysis, the cyclic evolution of Romance and Germanic negation is described – very roughly - by van Gelderen (2008:198) as a grammaticalisation cycle from former postverbal positive elements, situated e.g. inside the verbal domain as nominal complements (following Déprez 1999, and Roberts 2007, 145-146). Thus, the Modern French negative particle *pas* was a bare NP in Old French. The former nominal head, forced by the loss of referentiality when Old French lost its null indefinite determiners, was incorporated into Num° below NegP, then rose within the structure to become a negative element located in the specifier position of NegP, and potentially becoming a negative head.

(5) The negative cycle in terms of NegP according to van Gelderen (2008:198)



However, van Gelderen's (2008) attempt to describe a diachronic evolution in terms of a NegP analysis is cannot be applied to all negative items in the languages and varieties concerned in this special issue: first, as Larrivée (2011,16) states, the pathways of syntactic and semantic change taken by every single negative item as they emerge from the (often too scarce) empirical data, seem highly individual and should be treated as such. Second, syntactic differences between the varieties concerned (e.g. V2 in Old French and Germanic vs. SVO in Modern French and Romance varieties) create different syntactic and prosodic (frequency) effects on the negative elements in question. For instance the unaccented position following a lexical grammatical subject seems to 'protect' the Modern French negative marker *ne* from vanishing (shown by Meisner to appear), while French *ne* has been absent early

on in yes/no interrogative contexts as Martineau (2011) shows (see Rowlett 2011 for a syntactic account of Martineau's 2011 empirical results and Ingham this volume for the ambiguous syntactic behaviour of *ne* in Old French). The Middle Dutch preverbal negative *ne* is mainly dropped in V1 contexts such as questions, imperatives and conditionals. Hoeksema (this volume) explains this result, stating that the Middle Dutch *en/ne* is syntactically proclitic but phonologically enclitic. Hence, a 'one size fits all' model of the Jespersen cycle does not work for Romance and Germanic languages (let alone for other language families).

Furthermore, van Gelderen's (2008:198) illustration of the Jespersen cycle in (5) does not provide any information on the interaction of (the activation of) different stages of the Romance negative cycle with other syntactic or phonological changes. Some of these issues are, however, addressed by the contributions of Richard Ingham and Pierre Larrivé on French and by Jack Hoeksema on Middle Dutch in this volume. Ingham (this volume) takes up the NegP analysis of negation: in line with van Gelderen's (2008:198) account in (5), he states that Old French *ne* is hosted in the SpecNegP position, but argues that it never becomes a head of NegP. In the arising Modern French grammar, *ne* takes the position of a preverbal special clitic (in the sense of Zwicky 1977). Ingham (this volume) tries to relate the variation between the two syntactic positions of *ne* to broader syntactic changes in the history of French (such as loss of V2, of null determiners and pro-drop). On the other hand, Larrivé (this volume) shows that empirical evidence does not always support the view that different syntactic changes are linked to each other, and that the dual-reanalysis hypothesis put forward by Breitbarth (2009) for Germanic does not hold for French.

Based on the *Corpus Représentatif des Premiers Textes Français* (CORPTEF, Guillot 2010) and the TFA database (Kunstmann 2003), **Richard Ingham's** paper (*Old French negation, the Tobler/Mussafia law, and V2*) shows that Old French preverbal negation *ne* in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century displayed contradictory syntactic properties. It allowed null subjects, thus seeming to 'count' for V2 as a full preverbal constituent. It also respected the Tobler/Mussafia law being a host by allowing a pronominal clitic to stand in preverbal position. In these respects, it behaved like an ordinary clause-initial constituent. However, *ne* could not induce VSpro order (= an inflected verb followed by an overt pronominal subject), as an initial clause constituent would normally do, and indeed allowed a constituent preceding it to do so. Ingham argues that *ne* exhibits contradictory morpho-phonological properties, behaving on the one hand as a clitic itself, but on the other, as a host for pronominal clitics in the forms *ne/* and *nes*. These paradoxes are addressed by postulating that *ne* underwent a change in categorial status during the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, involving competition between two grammars (see Kroch 2001): one where *ne* acted as a free negative adverbial clause constituent co-existing (from earlier Old French onwards) with a grammar that saw *ne* acting as a special clitic negator.

Based on historical and modern French corpus data, **Pierre Larrivé** (*Reanalysis of negatives as polarity markers? The last 400 years of decline of the French*



*preverbal negative clitic*) tests the dual-reanalysis hypothesis formulated recently by Breitbarth (2009) with regard to the Jespersen cycle in Germanic languages. Breitbarth (2009) states that the evolution of negation, which has been analyzed as a grammaticalisation cycle so far, actually falls into two separate but connected reanalysis processes: while the reinforcing element acquires a negative feature, the former negative marker is reanalyzed as a negative polarity item. In contrast to this, Larrivé (this volume) shows that there is no empirical evidence for a dual-reanalysis in the evolution of French negation, since the use of the French preverbal negative marker *ne* in non-negative contexts stays consistently low. If *ne* was a negative polarity element, as suggested by the dual-reanalysis hypothesis, it should be used increasingly also in non-negative contexts.

Jack Hoeksema's contribution (*The Middle Dutch negative clitic: status, position and disappearance*) considers the Middle Dutch negative clitic *en/ne*, which still exists in Flemish dialects, but has disappeared from the other Dutch varieties during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Studies on the initial stages of this change (cf. Van der Horst & Van der Wal 1979, de Haan & Weerman 1984, Burridge 1993, Hoeksema 1997, Zeijlstra 2004, Postma & Bennis 2006, Breitbarth 2009) show interaction of syntactic and phonological factors. Syntactically, the negative clitic appears to be a proclitic on the finite verb, but phonologically an enclitic on the subject. This creates a problem in V1 contexts (questions, conditionals and imperatives – precisely the contexts where *en/ne*-drop is most frequent), because there is nothing that precedes the negative particle. Whereas for Hoeksema, who uses a database of negation occurrences covering most of the Dutch-speaking regions in the period from 1500 to 1750, there is no doubt about V1 contexts leading the way for the deletion of the Dutch negation clitic. Hoeksema also identifies factors favoring retention of the negative clitic, especially for the later periods (16-18<sup>th</sup> centuries), among them most prominently the string adjacency of *niet + en*.

#### **From stage 4 to stage 5 or 1: *How does the cycle 'end', 'stagnate' or 'restart'?***

English, like many other Germanic varieties, shifted to postverbal negation centuries ago, leaving contemporary researchers with the puzzle of reconstructing the loss of the preverbal negative from historic corpora (see e.g. Jäger 2008 for German). But some present age varieties, such as French or West Flemish, seem to oscillate between the stages 4 and 5 of the Jespersen cycle and might grant valuable insights into an ongoing change.

However, while much work has been published in recent years on (socio)linguistic variation within the expression of negation, especially on the variable absence and presence of French *ne*, (see e.g. Armstrong 2001, 2002, Armstrong/Smith 2002, Ashby 2001, Coveney 2002, Martineau/Mougeon 2003), these studies are poorly linked to the overall research on the Jespersen cycle as a cross-linguistic phenomenon. Thus, the French negative clitic *ne* is often conceived (too exclusively) as a sociolinguistic variable, i.e. depending on the speakers' demographic

characteristics, or as regional variable (e.g. absence in Canadian French, see Sankoff/Vincent 1980, or in Swiss French, see Fonseca-Greber 2007), without discussing or looking for the historical reasons for the observed variation in a systematic way. Integrating the systematic consideration of internal factors or pragmatic influences on its absence or presence will provide interesting insights into the course of the negative cycle. Meisner (to appear) shows, for example, that French *ne*-variation has to be interpreted as a prosodically determined variation: while syntactically free and phonologically heavy DP subjects in the left context of *ne* lead to its realization, clitic subjects almost always provoke its omission. An analysis of this asymmetry also accounts for the differences between formal oral communication (containing many lexical subjects and hence a high percentage of *ne*), and informal conversations with a very low rate of lexical subjects and of the negative clitic *ne*. Apart from this prosodically (and not sociolinguistically) driven distribution of French *ne*, new pragmatic values of the former clitic negative particles may also play a role in observed variation, as Liliane Haegeman and Anne Breitbarth (in this volume) show for the preverbal negative marker *en* in West Flemish.

**Liliane Haegeman / Anne Breitbarth** (*The distribution of preverbal en in (West) Flemish: syntactic and interpretive properties*) discuss the distribution of the negative particle *en* in a corpus of authentic West Flemish spontaneous utterances, which disappears from Standard Dutch in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. As it is still found in West Flemish informal conversations, parallels have often been drawn between this negative particle and French clitic *ne*, which seems to be optional and sensitive only to language external stylistic factors (but see Meisner in press). This would result in a location of West Flemish, together with French and contrary to Standard Dutch, on stage 4 of Jespersen's Cycle. However, Haegeman/Breitbarth argue convincingly for a new analysis of the Flemish data, given that *en* is only found in finite clauses, not optional and assuming a new function, one of signalling polarity emphasis. Thus it has completely lost its neutral unmarked negative function, has effectively 'exited' the Jespersen cycle, and becomes an element similar to discourse particles, conveying emphasis on the negation of the positive counterpart of the respective utterance. Based also on cross-linguistic evidence, the authors propose locating it lower than usually assumed, in a special focus projection right above vP, and argue that some of the effects of *en* can and should be explained pragmatically and are not necessarily encoded in syntax.

Taken together, the papers united in this special issue highlight specific aspects of Italo-Romance, French, Dutch and Flemish explicitly related to very broad questions regarding the (pre)conditions for the start, the evolution, and the 'end', 'stagnation' or 'restart' of the negative cycle. The authors provide vast empirical evidence from a number of old and modern varieties of French, Italo-Romance, and Germanic. Jespersen's generalization (cf. Jespersen 1917, 1924) still provides a useful heuristic tool to describe very general cross-linguistically observable developments in the expression of sentential negation (at least for Romance and Germanic), provided that we admit stages of variation, like in (2) and (3). We acknowledge that, for a broader

cross linguistic approach, Chatzoupoulou's (2013) semantic account of the Jespersen cycle might be helpful, and refer those who doubt the existence of this cycle, its universality and alternative (cognitive-semantic) explanations, to Larrivée (2011). All five contributions of this special issue indicate the strong need for detailed data-driven analyses and for comparative work on the expression of sentential negation. Their findings, while not in direct opposition to the original assumptions of the Jespersen cycle, reveal the relevance of specific grammatical properties of the single varieties under investigation for understanding the precise nature and direction of ongoing linguistic changes.

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